

The IDVA Update

2005 Legislative Session



The 2005 legislative session is set to begin the latter part of the first week in January and this will be the long session in which the Budget for the next two years will be crafted. There will be many bills brought forward on behalf of veterans in the State of Indiana. Among them is a bill to exempt military retired pay from state income taxes, a bill to extend DAV parking privileges to those with former POW plates, and another to rename Indianapolis International Airport to Wier Cook International Airport. There are many others

in the works that we have not heard about yet.

Among those this Department is very much in favor of is a bill proposed by Representative Peggy Welch of Bloomington that would extend the eligibility for tuition assistance beyond the enlistment of an Indiana National Guard soldier who was deployed outside the State of Indiana for a period equal to the length of the deployment. This bill would ensure that the individual Guard soldier would not lose the benefit which is the reason many of them joined the National Guard, and it enhances the Guard's recruiting effort by guaranteeing that the soldier will get the education promised. Our Guard men and women do not have the option to sign up for the GI Bill, and this would honor their commitment to our State and our Country.

HireVetsFirst.gov web site is now live

The National Hire Veterans Committee is happy to announce that the www.HireVetsFirst.gov web site is now available. The web site provides information on the Hire Vets First initiative and directs businesses interested in hiring veterans to America's Service Locator (http://www.servicelocator.org/nearest_onestop.asp) or to 1-877-US2-JOBS to find their closest One-Stop Career Center for services. The web site also refers veterans interested in employment opportunities to their nearest One-

Stop Career Center via the same methods. The National Hire Veterans Committee will be promoting the National Hire Vets First Campaign through various mediums beginning October 1, 2004. As a result of this media effort, your One-Stop Career Centers may experience an increase in calls from businesses interested in learning how they can access the veteran labor pool in your area.

Department of the Navy (DON) Disabled Veterans Assistance Phone Line

The Department of the Navy has established a Disabled Veterans Assistance Phone Line to provide employment and referrals for all returning disabled service members, recently medically retired service members, and their spouses. The phone line supports disabled veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, and all disabled veterans of other conflicts, campaigns, and wars.

The primary mission is to assist returning disabled veterans, recently medically retired veterans and their spouses in their search for employment with the Department of the Navy, as well as with other federal and state agencies.

The secondary mission is to provide resource and referral assistance to the target group. Referrals include, but are not limited to, the Veterans Administration, Department of Labor, and other Department of Defense agencies for the purpose of meeting and

addressing needs that are outside the scope of this program.

The phone number is **(800) 378-4559** and it will be staffed by a Human Resources Specialist (HRS). If the HRS is unavailable to take the call, the caller will receive a reply within one business day.

In addition to the Phone Line, there will be an e-mail address established for the target group to communicate with the Human Resources Specialist via e-mail if they prefer. In addition to the Phone Line and e-mail address, information will be posted on the Department of the Navy website at <http://www.donhr.navy.mil/>. As soon as the e-mail address is available we will publish it in this news letter.

Army Disabled Soldier Support System

The US Army has set up a Disabled Soldier Support System (DS3) out of their offices in the Hoffman II Building in Alexandria, Virginia, to assist severely disabled soldiers and their families in working through the issues surrounding their disabilities.

The DS3 office can be reached at 800-833-6622 (or ArmyDS3@hoffman.army.mil via e-mail). Their mission is to be the central point of contact for severely disabled soldiers and their families in clearing up issues involving their pay and allowances from the Army and any administrative issues that may crop up. For those soldiers who are categorized as Very Seriously Ill or Injured or Seriously Ill or Injured or who meet the special categories covered by the program which are: loss of limb or sight, permanent disfigurement, incurable or fatal disease, psychiatric condition or paralysis, the DS3 will assist families with travel

arrangements to visit the soldier in the hospital under Invitational Travel Orders.

More specific information is available at their website
http://www.wblo.org/data/modules/pbm/rendered/disabled_soldier_support_system.asp

Memo Improves Job Protection for Guardsmen Reservists

WASHINGTON, Sept. 30, 2004 -- Attorney General Ashcroft and Labor Secretary Chao signed a Memorandum of Understanding to ensure that the employment rights of men and women returning from military service are vigorously protected.

The Memorandum streamlines and strengthens enforcement of the Uniformed Services Employment and Re-employment Rights Act of 1994, commonly known as USERRA. Congress passed USERRA to safeguard the employment rights and benefits of service members upon their return to civilian life.

The Memorandum deals exclusively with each department's responsibilities in the enforcement of USERRA. The Attorney General has delegated his USERRA responsibilities to the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice and the U.S. Attorneys' offices.

The Department of Labor has delegated its USERRA responsibilities to the Veterans' Employment and Training Service and the Office of the Solicitor.

The Memorandum will streamline the enforcement process, allowing the two

agencies to work closely and effectively to ensure the protection of USERRA rights.

In Indiana call the Veterans' Employment and Training Division of the United States Department of Labor at 317- 232-6804 if you believe your right to re-employment has been violated.
(From a Department of Justice news release.)

New Veteran ID Cards to Help Fight Identity Theft

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs has had a new Veteran Identification Card designed. The new card will increase the security of the veteran's personal information, decreasing the possibility of identity theft - the fastest growing criminal activity in the world. The card will have a photo of the veteran and the veteran's name. The rest of the data will be encrypted on a magnetic strip on the back of the card.

The magnetic strip will contain the veteran's identification data, the veteran's birth date and whether the veteran has a service-connected disability.

VAMC Indianapolis reports that the new cards will be mailed within the next few months to each veteran who now has a VA Identification Card. There is no word on when, or if, the hospital will begin making the new cards

GSA and Disabled

Veteran-Owned Businesses

The U. S. General Services Agency (GSA) is actively working to ensure that the federal government complies with the congressional mandate to set aside 3% of government contracts for Service Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Businesses (SDVOSB). GSA's small business support contacts, located across the country, will reach out to SDVOSBs. Training will be offered on how to become a contractor on GSA's Federal Supply Schedules and how to sell to the \$280 billion federal marketplace.

The contacts for Indiana are:

Beverly Coley
Business Specialist
Room 3718
230 South Dearborn Street
Chicago, IL 60604
Phone: (312) 353-1100
Fax: (312) 886-9893
E-mail: beverly.coley@gsa.gov

And:

Maureen Cruz
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230 South Dearborn Street
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Phone: (312) 353-5384
Fax: (312) 886-9893
E-mail: maureen.cruz@gsa.gov

Jim Nicholson Nominated to Replace

Anthony Principi

The nominee to be the new Secretary of Veterans Affairs is Jim Nicholson. Mr. Nicholson is a West Point graduate who served an active duty tour in Vietnam and stayed in the Army Reserves for 22 years, retiring at the rank of Colonel.

In his civilian life he earned a masters degree in public policy from Columbia University and a law degree from the University of Denver.

Among his many accomplishments in both the private and public sectors are: he was the Chairman of the Republican National Committee from 1997 to 2001, and has served since 2001 as the U.S. Ambassador to the Holy See, Vatican City, Rome. Mr. Nicholson is a Knight of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta - one of the highest awards given to Roman Catholics.

Mr. Nicholson replaces Tony Principi who is leaving the position for personal reasons.

DOD-VA Agree on Discharge Examination Processing

The Departments of Defense (DOD) and Veterans Affairs (VA) signed an agreement this week to implement cooperative separation processes and physical examinations for the service members at discharge sites. This initiative is an extension of the 26 discharge sites that have been the test bed for this program since the mid-1990's. Both departments are committed to a seamless transition process for service members.

In a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA),

David S.C. Chu, Under Secretary for Defense, Personnel and Readiness, and Gordon H. Mansfield, Veterans Affairs Deputy Secretary, agreed on several key issues for separation and disability evaluations. The examination process includes providing adequate medical resources (examining physicians, laboratory facilities, examination rooms, and support staff) and additional testing and/or screening.

The departments also agree to begin exploring the technical feasibility, schedule, and cost requirements for the implementation of an electronic physical exam through a single, consistent electronic physical examination record which will meet military service and VA requirements. To fulfill such requirements in the past, service members underwent two physical examinations within months of each other when they filed for VA disability compensation. Neither of the examinations fully satisfied the needs of both VA and DOD. These redundant examinations inconvenienced service members, delayed claims processing and access to VA healthcare, and created an added cost to the federal government. This MOA helps to streamline the process without compromising the gathering of information critical to both departments.

This MOA is one of many initiatives undertaken by the two departments to create a more seamless process for service members to access benefits.

Retired Military Tax Statements

ARLINGTON, Va. (Nov. 29, 2004) - The end of the calendar year is quickly approaching and that means only one thing in the tax world - tax statements (W-2, 1099R). The Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) has

compiled a schedule of dates when service members, military retirees, annuitants and defense civilian employees can access their tax statements through myPay and when they can anticipate to receive the hardcopy delivery by mail.

Military members, retirees/annuitants and Department of Defense civilian employees will once again have access to view, save and print their tax statements from myPay at <https://mypay.dfas.mil>.

DFAS delivers personal pay information and provides the ability to process pay-related transactions timely, safely and securely to all its members through myPay. The Web-based system eliminates the risks associated with postal delivery by allowing members to access electronic tax statements and other financial information online. myPay matches existing industry standards for the highest level of encryption and security. This prevents customer information from being accessed by others on the Internet.

(From a Military.com story)

	myPay Access	Mail Dates
Retired Annual Statement	12/04/04	12/17/04 - 12/29/04
Retired 1099R	12/13/04	12/17/04 - 12/29/04
Annuitant Annual Statements	12/13/04	12/28/04 - 12/29/04
Annuitant 1099R	12/14/04	12/27/04 - 12/29/04
Air Force, Army, & Navy Reserve W2s	12/27/04	01/04/05 - 01/05/05
Civilian W2s	01/06/05	01/10/05 - 01/14/05
Marine Corps Active & Reserve W2s	01/10/05	01/18/05
Air Force, Army, & Navy Active W2	01/14/05	01/18/05 - 01/24/05

Indiana Veterans Home Seeks Assistant Superintendent

The Indiana Veterans Home is beginning the search for a new Assistant Superintendent and hopes to fill the job around the first of the year. The candidate must have, or be able to get, a Health Facilities Administrator (HFA) license and would need to have some related hospital or nursing home experience. A veteran would be preferred. All the services have a Medical Administrator track within their respective Medical Corps, and this sounds like a job for someone recently separated from that line of work.

The successful candidate could expect to “fleet up” when Bob Hawkins retires in a couple of years. If you know of an interested party please have them send a resume directly to Robert T. Hawkins, HFA, Supt., Indiana Veterans Home, 3851 N. River Road, West Lafayette, IN 47906

Closure of Inpatient Beds at Marion

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs has made a decision to close the acute medical care unit at the Marion VA Campus. Patients needing hospitalization will be sent to the Fort Wayne Campus, which is also scheduled to be closed, or to the VA Medical Center in Indianapolis. This leaves the Northern Region with no acute care beds in any VA facility. All of the patients needing a hospital stay will be sent to Indianapolis.

The VA has put out a pamphlet that explains what will happen if a veteran uses a civilian facility in an emergency.

If a patient becomes ill and needs to be hospitalized for a service-connected issue and the VA was “not feasibly available” and the VA is contacted within 72 hours, then the VA

“may” pay for the hospital stay.

If a patient becomes ill and must be hospitalized for a non-service-connected issue and the VA was “not feasibly available”, and the individual is enrolled in the VA, and the individual has been seen by the VA in the last 24 months, and the individual has no insurance or Medicaid, and the VA is contacted within 72 hours, then the VA “may” pay for the hospital care.

When the VA was asked to define the phrase “not feasibly available”, the answer was that it would be determined on a case-by-case basis. When we asked who would be making the decision we were told the Chief of Staff at Marion would be making the decision. There is no timeframe attached to the decision-making process.

When we asked why the word “may” was used in the process the answer was that there are other factors that must be considered but nobody could address what those factors were.

The basic understanding was that if an 85 year-old WWII veteran, service-connected for a heart condition, has abdominal pain at 3 in the morning and his family takes him to the nearest hospital only to discover that grandpa should not have eaten pepperoni pizza, the VA will not pay for that hospital visit. That surely seems like an awful burden to put on a family.

Tax Code Changes Effective January 2005

The dollar amounts for the property tax deductions change to the following effective January 1, 2005:

Tax Code 1. A \$12,480 dollar deduction is available to veterans who:

- a. Served at least 90 days of honorable

service.

And:

b. Are totally disabled (not necessarily service-connected but the disability must be evidenced by a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs pension certificate).

Or:

c. Are at least 62 years old and 10% service-connected disabled.

Note: This deduction is not available if the assessed value of the real property owned by the veteran is in excess of \$113,000.

Tax Code 2. A \$24,960 tax deduction is available for veterans who:

a. Served honorably in the Armed Forces during any period of wartime.

And:

b. Are at least 10% service-connected disabled.

Tax Code 3. A \$37,440 tax deduction is available for any veteran who:

a. Served honorably during any period of wartime.

And:

b. Is 100% service connected-disabled.

Or:

c. Is at least 62 years of age with at least

a 10% service-connected disability.

Notes:

1. A statutory disability rating for Pulmonary TB is not eligible.

2. Active duty for training with the National Guard or Reserves is eligible only if the disability occurs from an event during the period of active duty and that duty was performed during wartime.

3. The surviving spouse of the veteran is eligible for the veteran's tax deduction. The spouse must apply in his or her own name.

Ref: IC 6-1.1-12-14, IC 6-1.1-12-15.

DFAS Adds Voice-Activated Phone Line

Military retirees and annuitants are now able to obtain specific account information through the Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS). When customers call 1-800-321-1080 (commercial 216-522-5955), they will hear a new menu option to use this feature.

Customers choosing to use this new feature will be asked to enter their social security number and Personal Identification Number (PIN). Customers can use the same PIN to access the IVRS that they use to access myPay. Retirees and annuitants will be able to obtain specific account information in the following areas:

Correspondence address for allotments

Certificate of Eligibility or Report of Existence

Deductions

Gross and net pay

Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) coverage

Federal and state taxes

This service will be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If you do not have a myPay PIN, please visit the myPay website at <https://mypay>

Military Funeral Honors

Federal law now requires the rendering of Military Funeral Honors for any eligible veteran if the veteran's family requests it. The law mandates an Honors Detail of at least two members of the Armed Services and one of them must be member of the veteran's branch of service.

The ceremony will include the folding of the flag, presenting the flag to the next of kin, and playing Taps. Taps will be played by a bugler if one is available or by electronic recording. The electronic recording provided with the Military Funeral Honors kit given to funeral homes was made at Arlington National Cemetery on Memorial Day 1999.

Military Funeral Honors Details are provided at no cost to the family by the Department of Defense.

Funeral Directors should have received a Military Funeral Honors kit which includes a Military Funeral Honors Directory. The directory is intended for the use of the funeral directors only, and gives them a point of contact for information for the area in which the veteran is to be interred.

An internet website has detailed information:

<http://www.militaryfuneralhonors.osd.mil>

For questions about the Military Funeral Honors Program in Indiana please contact MSGT Luella M. VanArsdale at (317) 247-3238 or SFC (RET) Charles W. Warren at (317) 247-3483.